

Pabloite NPA hails pro-business Umbrella for Democratic Change's election victory in Botswana

Alejandro López
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Last month, Duma Boko, leader of the Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC), was sworn in as Botswana's president on November 1, the first time an opposition party has taken power in the country's history. It followed October's parliamentary elections, where the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), which had ruled uninterruptedly since independence in 1966, was defeated. The UDC secured 35 of 61 seats in the National Assembly, reducing the BDP to just four.

This outcome reflects widespread yearning for social change among workers, youth and the rural masses after 58 years of BDP rule. It is part of a broader, regionwide surge of opposition to traditional bourgeois-nationalist ruling parties, fueled by rising inequality, poverty, state repression and the soaring cost of living exacerbated by NATO's war in Ukraine against Russia and IMF austerity measures.

South Africa's ANC, which has ruled for three decades since the end of apartheid, lost its overall majority in June. In Namibia, the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), in power since independence in 1990, continued its fall in the polls, winning the presidency with a disputed 57 percent vote. Mozambique's FRELIMO party was declared the winner of the October elections amid widespread charges of vote rigging. This ignited nationwide protests and the largest opposition movement in FRELIMO's nearly half-century rule since independence from Portugal; police killed at least 110 people.

The international Pabloite website *International Viewpoint* and the French Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) weekly *L'Anticapitaliste* are working to foster illusions in pro-business bourgeois parties as alternatives to the region's traditional ruling parties in the region. This aims to prevent the growing opposition within the African working class from developing into a struggle for socialism, while providing a "left" cover for reactionary capitalist parties.

This is the character of the article "Left victory in Botswana" penned by Paul Martial, a regular contributor to *International Viewpoint* and editor of *Afriques en Lutte* and a member of NPA. He writes:

More than a defeat, it was a rout. The Umbrella for Democratic Change won 36 seats and obtained an absolute majority, with its leader Duma Boko becoming president. [...] Botswana has lived up to its reputation as a democratic country, with Mokgweetsi Masisi, the outgoing president, acknowledging his defeat and undertaking a fair transfer of

power.

Boosting the UDC's "left" credentials, Martial continues:

From 2012 onwards, the UDC was formed, with the Botswana National Front as its backbone, a party claiming to be a social-democrat from which Duma Boko emerged. The other decisive elements are the social themes of the UDC campaign, which revolve around youth employment and, as the media outlet *The Voice Botswana* points out: 'a national health insurance scheme that will guarantee everyone access to quality health care, paid for by the government and guaranteeing them a decent life and livelihood'. In a country where prosperity benefits a minority, such a proposal hits the nail on the head. [...] Financing this measure will require a new distribution of wealth to the detriment of the country's wealthy elite. Will the UDC be prepared to do this? Popular mobilisation will be a decisive factor in imposing this new social policy.

The rosy picture Martial paints of the UDC is a fraud. The party campaigned on promises of job creation amid soaring unemployment—officially rising from 25.9 percent in 2023 to 27.6 percent in 2024, with youth unemployment exceeding 35 percent. It also pledged economic diversification from the diamond industry, which accounts for over 80 percent of Botswana's exports and a quarter of its GDP, and improved access to quality healthcare. But the UDC is a pro-business party poised to abandon its electoral promises.

Newly-elected President Boko, a 54-year-old lawyer and Harvard Law School graduate who previously ran in 2014 and 2019, represents a faction of the elite that perceives itself as having been excluded from the wealth under the BDP's corrupt 58-year rule. It aims to secure its share of the crumbs from the major international corporations' exploitation in the mining industry. During the campaign, Boko called to open the economy to corporations and attacked "over-regulation," signaling deeper privatizations, cuts to civil service jobs and attacks on working conditions.

At the launch of the UDC's 2024 manifesto in August, Boko outlined his pro-capitalist agenda. He declared:

The UDC presents a programme that will do away with the over-regulation of the business environment which impedes business and frustrates economic growth. It seeks to create a competitive business climate conducive to the attraction of both market-seeking and efficiency-seeking Foreign Direct Investment. The UDC will transform Botswana into a regional hub in Tourism and Hospitality, Transportation and Infrastructure, Banking and Finance, Innovation and ICT, Education and Health.

After his election, Boko's immediate priority has been to mend Botswana's relations with De Beers, the world's largest diamond producer. Botswana is the world's second-biggest natural diamond producer behind Russia. Boko's predecessor, Mokgweetsi Masisi, had demagogically tried to garner electoral support by accusing De Beers of "short-changing" Botswana and "leaving us in poverty [while] they got rich." Boko dropped the issue upon his election.

In his first speech as president, Boko said, "we have to try [to] safeguard the goose that lays for us the golden egg," hailing the partnership of De Beers and the government of Botswana in the joint venture of Debswana, which provides most of the group's diamonds in Botswana. He met with representatives of De Beers, declaring afterwards:

What we agreed is that the world's leading diamond country, the Republic of Botswana, and the world's leading diamond company, De Beers, will stand shoulder-to-shoulder in marketing and creating desire for natural diamonds.

Boko's calls for "economic diversification" mean opening Botswana's vast deposits of other minerals—such as copper, nickel and coal with estimated reserves of approximately 212 billion tons, as well as soda ash, salt and gold—to corporate exploitation.

Boko has also authorized the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to build a military logistics hub in Botswana to ensure rapid deployment of troops. The 19 hectare-SADC Standby Force Regional Logistics Depot will be built in Rasesa, 40 kilometers north of the capital, Gaborone.

SADC troops could be deployed to crush social opposition across the region. Boko said:

We have taken it upon ourselves to respond, to take to these trouble spots and deploy forces to assist and to bring an end to the conflicts. Such missions require facilities where the equipment they will need in the execution of their missions will be kept and from which such equipment can then be moved and distributed with speed and dispatched to the front lines where it is needed.

Martial's uncritical portrayal of the UDC as "social democratic" is a clumsy ploy to falsely associate the UDC with socialism. But for decades, European social democratic parties have abandoned reformism, instead imposing brutal austerity measures. These parties have also been central to war efforts in countries like Germany, the

UK, Spain and Portugal, actively supporting NATO's war against Russia in Ukraine and endorsing Israeli genocide in Gaza. They have funneled millions of dollars in weaponry to far-right regimes in Kiev and Tel Aviv.

It has been over 70 years since the political ancestors of the Pabloite organizations like the NPA that Martial belongs to and *International Viewpoint* split from the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in 1953. They claimed that bourgeois nationalists—like Botswana Democratic Party, SWAPO, FRELIMO and the ANC—together with social democratic and Stalinist parties would provide revolutionary leadership to the working class.

Having broken with working class politics, the Pabloites have evolved as petty-bourgeois groups for decades. Since the restoration of capitalism in China and the Soviet Union, the Pabloites have turned ever further to the right, endorsing the wars waged by US imperialism, including in Libya, Syria and the present US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and preparations for war with China, which threaten to escalate into a nuclear war.

In reality, Botswana illustrates the correctness of Leon Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution. Trotsky insisted that in the colonial countries, the struggle for democracy could not be separated from the fight for workers' power and the implementation of socialist policies. Tied by innumerable threads to foreign imperialism, the bourgeoisie of countries like Botswana is a thousand times more fearful of the working class than of imperialism. The struggle for socialism, Trotsky insisted, must be conducted on the basis of an international strategy directed toward the global mobilization of the working class against capitalism.

Botswana since independence in 1966 is a textbook example. The national bourgeoisie has ruled for over six decades, imposing poverty on the masses while opening the economy to unfettered exploitation. Today, Botswana is one of the most unequal countries in the world, along with its neighbors Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Eswatini (Swaziland).

According to the UN Population Fund, the wealthiest 20 percent of Botswana's population accounted for nearly 60 percent of the nation's income, and the poorest 40 percent shared less than 12 percent.

Claims that right-wing tendencies like the UDC will use this wealth to increase social spending under the pressure of "popular mobilisation," as Martial claims, are false. The only viable program for the workers and oppressed masses of Southern Africa is Permanent Revolution, advanced by the International Committee of the Fourth International. Only independent revolutionary struggle by the working class, unifying struggles of workers across the region against both the native bourgeoisie and imperialism with workers struggles in the imperialist centers, can establish democratic and social rights.



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